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TAGS: [EAID](#) [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [HO](#)
SUBJECT: TFH01: DONORS PRAISE ELECTIONS AND DISCUSS NEXT STEPS

REF: A. TEGUCIGALPA 1221
[1](#)B. TEGUCIGALPA 1229

Classified By: AMBASSADOR HUGO LLORENS FOR REASONS 1.4 B AND D.

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Participants in a November 30 meeting of the G-16 donor group were uniformly impressed by how well the November 29 elections had gone. In a briefing to the group, a representative of the National Democratic Institute (NDI) said that he had monitored every election since 1993 and the November 29 election was technically the best he has observed. A representative of the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) expressed similarly positive views. During a discussion of next steps, the group agreed that, regardless of whether President Zelaya returns to power, it is important for some kind of restoration of democratic order to take place before the Presidential inauguration on January 27. End summary.

Praise for Elections

[1](#)2. (C) During a November 30 meeting of the G-16 donor group, Eduardo Nunez of NDI and Rafael Lopez-Pintor of IFES provided their views on the election process. (Both groups were funded by USAID.) Nunez said that he has monitored every election in Honduras since 1993, and the 2009 election was technically the best he has observed. He showed the group a chart plotting electoral participation since 2001, using a figure of 47 percent for 2009. (Note: Earlier official projections showed a higher rate, but more recent projections are closer to this estimate. End note.) The chart was a straight downward-sloping line, indicating that a 47 percent figure would be exactly in line with the downward trend since 2001. Higher figures would be surprising given past trends, he said. Nunez praised the professionalism of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE), which he noted had moved ahead with the announcement of the preliminary results despite initial resistance from one party (i.e. the Liberal Party). Lopez-Pintor also praised the elections from a technical perspective, commenting that capacity-building efforts sponsored by donors in recent years have led to more effective voting operations at the local level.

[1](#)3. (C) UN Resident Coordinator Rebeca Arias said that the overall atmosphere on election day was very good. Despite concerns before the election, there were no killings or major violence. She noted that there had been sporadic incidents,

including the detention of 50 people for promoting boycotting the election and a clash between police and protesters in San Pedro Sula (ref A), but said that in general the human rights situation on election day was not problematic.

¶4. (C) During a discussion following the departure of the NDI and IFES representatives, donor representatives expressed largely positive views of the election. Non-resident Canadian Ambassador Neil Reeder (ref B) said that he and his colleagues had visited some 20 polling stations as unofficial monitors. He described the atmosphere as a "fiesta civica" and said that the climate was more positive than the Canadians had expected. Ambassador Reeder said that the TSE was to be congratulated for the professionalism and transparency of the elections. He noted that turnout appeared significantly higher in middle-class and upper-class areas than in poor areas. The Economic Counselor said that the Embassy had sent 20 teams to locations all over the country to assess the situation unofficially and that their assessments were uniformly positive. The German representative agreed that things had gone well on election day. However, he said that it was too early to say that the process as a whole had gone well or to congratulate the Hondurans, given issues such as the uncertainty about turnout and the low turnout in rural areas.

What Next?

¶5. (C) An item on the agenda regarding plans for a December 1 meeting with President-elect Pepe Lobo led to a debate on next steps to resolve the political crisis. The Swedish

representative asked what stance the international community should take if Congress voted not to return President Zelaya to power on December 2. The Economic Counselor said that the elections were a necessary but not sufficient step. Now that there is a President-elect, the question is how to arrive at a situation that will allow reengagement with the new government. The fundamental principal, she said, is that there needs to be a return to constitutional order before the inauguration to avoid the direct transfer of power from Micheletti to Lobo. The Tegucigalpa-San Jose Accord is the mechanism available for achieving this goal.

¶6. (C) The Italian representative said that there needs to be a government of national reconciliation. While "we all hope that it will be led by Zelaya," this may well not happen. The people who voted for Lobo, she said, are mostly against President Zelaya's return, making it unlikely that Lobo would change his stance and begin pushing for Congress to vote to return him to office. UN Resident Coordinator Arias said that the theme of restoration of constitutional order is important not just as a matter of principle but as a practical necessity. Without a process of reconciliation, there will always be sectors within Honduras trying to make Lobo's life difficult. She said that it is in Lobo's own long-term interest to seek a return to constitutional order.

¶7. (C) Comment: It was clear from the discussion that all present were impressed and relieved by how well the elections went. The positive assessment by the highly experienced NDI and IFES observers reinforced this sentiment. The donor representatives held little hope for President Zelaya's return by Congress and were seeking another mechanism that would allow the resumption of assistance once the Lobo government takes over. The Italian representative's emphasis on a government of national reconciliation, which was echoed by other speakers, indicated that donors consider this a promising way forward. This discussion indicates willingness among the donor community to think creatively about next steps in the event that Congress does not restore President Zelaya on December 2. End comment.

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